

**Tertiary Education
Commission**
Te Amorangi Mātauranga Matua



International Practice in Support of Dyslexic Learners in Tertiary Education

Potential Applications in the New Zealand Context

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Every effort is made to provide accurate and factual content. The TEC, however, cannot accept responsibility for any inadvertent errors or omissions that may occur.

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Purpose and scope

This report is a review of how tertiary organisations and government agencies in comparable jurisdictions to New Zealand respond to the needs of learners with a dyslexia profile. It includes recommendations regarding how New Zealand tertiary and government agencies could better respond to the needs of a significant minority, of learners whose learning needs have not been met by the compulsory schooling sector, have left school with literacy difficulties, yet may want to enter tertiary education.

Dyslexia is an area where New Zealand has, for a number of reasons, not kept up with the developments in some other comparable jurisdictions. The jurisdictions chosen for comparison are English speaking, and countries that New Zealand often uses for comparison. Tertiary organisations were chosen for this review, although in the United Kingdom some organisations were educational organisations for those aged 16+, which straddle secondary and tertiary education in the New Zealand environment.

Terminology

Dyslexia is the most commonly recognised and widely understood of a group of potentially disabling neurological presentations (neurodiversities) that impact on education, social inclusion, and effective participation in the workplace.

Neurodiversity and Dyslexia are sometimes used as interchangeable terms, however neurodiversity encompasses a wider range of learning differences than just dyslexia.

Three terms are often used interchangeably to describe the same condition: *Dyslexia* is a condition where people struggle with text. That is reading, writing and spelling. It is not an indication of low intelligence and most often comes with a range of skills and talents¹. *Neurodiversity* includes a number of neurological conditions of which dyslexia is the most common. Included amongst the suite of neurodiverse conditions is Dyslexia, ADHD, Dyscalculia, Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD, formerly referred to as Dyspraxia), Autism Spectrum Disorder and Irlen's Syndrome. Many people have more than one neurodiverse condition. *Learning Differences*² is also used for dyslexia, as is *learning difficulties*.

Limitations

Dyslexia is a relatively new field of study in Australasia. Dyslexia was not recognised by the Ministry of Education in New Zealand until 2007, and not recognised in the Trades and Further Education sector in Australia until 2013³. Because of this there is limited peer reviewed research on effective practices to support learners in tertiary education, particularly in the vocational education space. Research that does exist highlights the wide variety of approaches⁴.

1 British Dyslexia Association (abridged)

2 Learning Disabilities or Learning Difficulties are previously used terms that are going out of favour and usage, because of the deficit framing of this language.

3 research.usc.edu.au/discovery/fulldisplay/alma99451171502621/61USC_INST:ResearchRepository

4 *Dyslexia in Context* – edited by Dr Gavin Read and Dr Angela Fawcett, 2004, John Wiley and Sons.

Because supporting dyslexia in the tertiary space is a developing field of knowledge, the landscape for this review is one that is currently under change and so this review can only be a snapshot of current practice. Since this report is focused on international practice rather than a review of dyslexia theoretical research, the bulk of the references included in this document are from websites, government agency information and the latest developments gleaned from attendance at recent international conferences. This practice scan includes a selection of countries only and does not purport to be an inclusive overview.

The state of dyslexia and dyslexia support worldwide

Worldwide there is a rapidly growing understanding of dyslexia and how to support learners with dyslexia to achieve to their potential. As outlined later in the report this progress has resulted from research findings in a wide range of related fields. Anecdotal evidence gathered by the author from attendance at international conferences suggests the United Kingdom is a world leader in the areas of dyslexia awareness, dyslexia research and dyslexia support⁵. The author is aware of pockets of good practice across many European countries, but it appears that the uptake by individual organisations is patchy at best⁶. In the United States they have a federal law – the Individuals with Disabilities Act (1990 and 2004) that covers dyslexia, but each state determines its own response.

The environment for dyslexia

A strong determinant of a nation's response to dyslexia is the presence or absence of government legislation that makes specific reference to it. For this author, currently the United Kingdom (UK) stands out as the leading nation in its support for dyslexia and dyslexic learners, both in legislative terms and concrete actions.

The UK environment, and that of other comparable jurisdictions is discussed later in the report.

5 Dyslexia Association of Singapore – Deborah Hewes – personal communication

6 OECD Directorate for Education and Skills – Mapping policy approaches for the inclusion of students with special educational needs, Working paper 227. and UNESCO World Conference on Special Education Needs – The Inclusion of students with dyslexia in higher education, Marco Pino and Luigina Mortaci.

Executive summary

Positive practices in tertiary education organisations

The summary below highlights existing practices gathered from tertiary education organisations from a selected range of comparable jurisdictions outside New Zealand. Taken together, it could be argued that these positive actions are likely to lead to increased access to, progress through, and achievement in tertiary education for dyslexic learners.

1. Dyslexia support is part of a supportive wider environment

It is arguably the case that better outcomes are achieved when tertiary organisations exist in an environment where dyslexia is understood by the community the organisation serves⁷. When there are dyslexia specialist organisations available nearby, the flow of information both ways is increased. For example, in the United Kingdom the nation at large, as a result of legislation and various reports, seems relatively aware of dyslexia. For learners, the likelihood that they need to explain the nature of their dyslexia to others who have little understanding is reduced, and they have an increased likelihood of entering tertiary organisations with a sound understanding of their own situation.

2. There is a free flow of quality information

Good practices exist in tertiary organisations where there is quality information about dyslexia available to learners, tutors; learning support staff and other stakeholders. In this environment dyslexia is recognised and regularised. Learners with dyslexia and non-dyslexic learners understand and accept dyslexia as something that impedes learning and requires assistance.

3. There is a holistic response to dyslexia

Commitment to support dyslexia exists right across the organisation. Positive practices emanate from tertiary organisations where dyslexia is proactively discussed, there are senior staff specifically charged with responsibilities to support dyslexic learners and the organisation is committed to make a difference. Policies governing how the organisation responds to dyslexia, and the response to dyslexia, are holistic. The organisation takes a wider view that it is not a remedial condition unrelated to teaching, but one that is part of the student body and requires knowledge, understanding, intervention, and accountability from teaching and administrative staff.

4. Support for dyslexia is visible and upfront

Support for dyslexic learners is visible and upfront, as opposed to being difficult to access. Some tertiary organisations have accessibility functions readily available on their website, for example, so learners can change the font type and size, and have key documents read aloud to them. The most effective support is where this accessibility is made easy to navigate for all learners and especially for those with a dyslexia profile.

⁷ www.mmu.ac.uk/esri/research/projects/dyslexia-support

5. Active partnerships with external organisations exist and guide practice

Some tertiary organisations have proactively partnered with national or regional dyslexia specialist organisations, like SPELD in New Zealand, or national dyslexia associations like the British Dyslexia Association, the Dyslexia Association of Singapore, or the Australian Dyslexia Association to assist them with catering to the learning requirements of learners with dyslexia. There is a flow of information and research findings between the academic education organisations and other dyslexia providers.

6. Support for dyslexic learners extends beyond just learner support

Effective tertiary organisations interact with dyslexia at a holistic whole-of-organisation level, as opposed to just relegating dyslexia support to the learning support department. Some organisations spell out clearly the rights of dyslexic learners (Yale University, for example). Yale also has a Center for Dyslexia and Creativity, which investigates how it is that many tertiary learners with dyslexia show strengths in creativity. This serves to bring dyslexia and dyslexic people into the mainstream of tertiary learning, and to the centre of what tertiary organisations try to teach, which is innovation and creativity, as opposed to leaving them at the margins of learning focus.

7. The impact of assistive technologies

The most effective organisations provide learners with access to a range of assistive technologies, websites, and other supports to level the playing field for dyslexic learners. Campus-wide access to Dragon Naturally Speaking, Read&Write, Studiosity and Dear Dyslexic are all examples where small and relatively inexpensive interventions make a big difference. Free access to these services benefits dyslexic and regular learners alike. Some providers report that learners not identified as dyslexic also use assistive technology for their study.

8. Signing up to Codes of Best Practice

In jurisdictions where they are available organisations sign up to National Codes of best practice, such as the UK SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) Code of Practice. Initiatives like this serve to heighten awareness of diversity. A somewhat comparable document in New Zealand is Kia Ōrite⁸ – Implementation of the New Zealand Code of Practice to Achieve an Inclusive and Equitable Tertiary Education Environment for Disabled Learners. The guide is being re-developed and will be available in its new form in mid-2021.

9. The value of national quality marks

Quality Marks, like the *Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark (DFQM)*⁹, or the *Dyslexia Smart award*¹⁰ are a strong indicator of positive practice at tertiary level. These are externally moderated and verify that the possessors of that mark are following recommended practice. They commit organisations to meeting the needs of learners and send a signal to learners they can be safe and well supported in that organisation. A central feature of the DQFM is that it examines and promotes effective and research driven classroom practices in meeting the needs of dyslexic learners. The networks set up around the DQFM and between those organisations that have the QM have served to build sector competence and positive practice in meeting the needs of dyslexic learners.

8 www.achieve.org.nz/resources/kia-orite-code-of-practice

9 See Appendices for more information

10 See Appendices for more information

10. The connection between research and positive practice in tuition

Research findings in a particular discipline can lead to improved practices by educators working in that discipline. This occurs as quality research leads to improved knowledge and understanding which in turn leads to stimulated and inspired educators and improved student outcomes. In turn learners are inspired to research in those areas that excite them. This kind of strategic development has been supported in New Zealand through the Centres of Research Excellence (CoREs) initiative – though not in the area of dyslexia.

Yale University (USA), Edgehill University (UK)¹¹ and Birmingham City University (UK)¹² are all examples where a strong research profile in the area of dyslexia has led to high quality tuition for learners.

11. The value of strong leadership and strength in numbers

In many jurisdictions the impact of a small number of strong leaders is evident in furthering the support for dyslexia. Leadership from the very highest level will have the most impact. Yet the number of people in any one organisation responsible for supporting dyslexic learners is often very small or non-existent. Organisations do better for dyslexic learners when there is centralised support and guidance from outside organisations. There is strength in numbers.

Positive practices in government settings

The summary below highlights positive practices seen in government policy and programme settings from a range of comparable jurisdictions outside New Zealand. Taken together, these actions, if implemented here, are likely to lead to support the education system to enable increased access to, progress through, and achievement in tertiary education for dyslexic learners.

Where relevant, comment is included regarding comparable settings in New Zealand.

1. Quality information

There is readily available, extensive, research-based information available about dyslexia on international government agency websites. This information is directed at professionals, parents, and learners. It is written in plain English and can be readily understood by laypeople. In this way dyslexia is normalised and understood by the community.

In New Zealand provision of this kind of information for the tertiary sector does not seem to be a responsibility of any government agency. There is little readily available information on government websites, outside the compulsory education secondary and primary schooling sector focused Te Kete Ipurangi (www.tki.org.nz).

2. A strong 'sign-posting' role

Government agencies can provide valuable information for tertiary learners and whānau on how best to navigate their way around the services available to support people with dyslexia. Information about where to access further information or which educational facilities specialise in support for dyslexic learners is often made available on overseas government agency websites.

11 www.edgehill.ac.uk/psychology/people/academic-staff/professor-rod-nicolson

12 www.bcu.ac.uk/health-education-and-life-sciences

However, in New Zealand there is a general scarcity of information for learners or whānau. Government agencies have a strong focus on direction and expectations of providers, with little information or advice for whānau, learners or the general public.

3. Open and obvious collaboration between government agencies and dyslexia-expert agencies

In the most informative systems, overseas government agencies delegate the authority to advise on dyslexia to national dyslexia associations who have some expertise. Expert Dyslexia Associations or organisations provide advice and guidance in policy work.

In New Zealand the current arrangement between TEC and Ako Aotearoa for provision of learning support advice is a similar arrangement, but on a lesser scale.

4. Government agencies provide significant grant funding for national dyslexia associations

In some instances, up to half the running costs of national dyslexia associations is provided from central and/or State governments. See further details later.

5. Government agencies often contract to dyslexia associations for specialist services

In this way the authority and expertise of associations is well utilised, acknowledged and enhanced.

6. Responsibility for dyslexia support is shared across multiple agencies – not just education ones

In the UK, for example, Education, Health and Social Services are all charged with meeting the needs of dyslexic citizens. This responsibility extends to regional as well as central government.

7. Government agencies accept that dyslexia can be a “whole of life” condition, not just one affecting children

There is a widespread understanding that dyslexia impacts on more than just education. There is quality information about dyslexia on the National Health Service (NHS) website, because it is accepted as a health as well as an education issue, and one that impacts across the whole personal, social and working life of people who are dyslexic. The same applies to Social Services, Prisons, and many other government agencies.

8. Education agencies take direct responsibility for administering learner support funding

In the United Kingdom the Education Ministry administers the ‘Disabled Student Allowance’ directly, rather than via a third party. This relationship provides for direct information, management and targeting of the support to education.

In New Zealand one example of such practice is for funding for assistive technologies to be provided by Workbridge – whose main brief is to support the Ministry of Social Development with getting people off benefit and into work.

9. Government agencies have adopted the SEND Code of practice

The United Kingdom's SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) Code spells out recommended practice. The code applies to a wide range of government agencies beyond Education, including Health and Social Services as well as local authorities. Government agencies are required to comply with the standards unless there is a compelling reason not to.

10. Ready access for people with disabilities/learning difficulties

Government agencies in the United Kingdom are required to comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1. These are website standards of accessibility for people with disabilities and/or differences that cover functions such as 'read aloud' and 'magnification of text', and 'background colour', among a range of others. In instances where the website is not compliant an action plan must be notified advising the steps taken to address the shortcomings.

Access to this support is widely signposted on their websites, ensuring people with disabilities of all types can access government agency websites with greater ease.

While the New Zealand government also has accessibility standards¹³, the only government agency website where accessibility support is obvious is the Human Rights Commission¹⁴.

11. Scholarship grants for research into dyslexia

Some government agencies in other jurisdictions fund research into dyslexia related matters. This, along with legislation covering dyslexia, has collectively contributed to the establishment of a strong, authoritative, and well informed knowledge base and quantum of research expertise to move the field forward so that more progress can be made in this complex area (visible in the United Kingdom in particular). Expertise exists at Universities like Oxford and other places in research, teaching, assessing, and general support for people with dyslexia.

12. In many jurisdictions, government agencies publish quality differentiated data about disabilities.

Government agencies publish comprehensive annual data about the occurrence of different forms of "disability" on an annual basis. Things that get measured and reported are exposed to the view of the public and the media. What gets measured gets addressed.

New Zealand has very limited available data on disability. The current NZ Disability Action Plan has this as a major focus area.

13 www.digital.govt.nz/standards-and-guidance/design-and-ux/accessibility

14 www.hrc.co.nz

Examples from other jurisdictions

This section details government settings and educational context and positive practices gathered from a selected range of comparable jurisdictions outside New Zealand. The Executive Summary above is a distillation of positive practices detailed below. The recommendations (next section) are based on positive practices observed from overseas.

The United Kingdom

The environment for dyslexia

In the United Kingdom the level of support for dyslexia is strongly influenced by a legislative framework. The starting point of the legislative support was the Rose Report on dyslexia 2009¹⁵. This led to the Equality Act 2010 and the Children's and Families Act of 2014¹⁶.

The Equality Act¹⁷ had a dramatic effect on education, health and social services and the workplace. Under it, the responsibility to support dyslexic learners sits with the Health sector as well as the Education sector. Specific actions fall to regional and local councils as well as central government.

The government of the day provided for dyslexia assessments to be available for all children falling behind in literacy skills alongside a parcel of funding to accompany a child identified as dyslexic through school and into Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE). That funding includes human support and assistive technologies.

The impacts extended into the workplace, where employers were obliged to provide a dyslexia-friendly working environment for any staff identified as dyslexic. That could include the following:

- › Adjustments to computer settings – including the provision of two screens. (To enable tasks to be deconstructed into manageable parts) A separate or partitioned workspace. (To reduce workplace distractions)
- › Digital recorders and other technological aids, including “smart pens” and reading pens.
- › More appropriate training requirements that provided effective learning strategies.

The impact on education and health was extensive. There was already in existence some support agencies for dyslexia, but the legislation served to create a specialist business sector that covered dyslexia requirements for all of primary and secondary education. The impact on FE and HE (tertiary education) teaching/educational practices was less impacting, but did have some effect.

The legislative changes coincided with an increase in research on dyslexia neurology and the number of Master's and Doctoral theses exploring elements of dyslexia expanded significantly¹⁸.

The combination of a legislative framework, significant funding to education and a stimulation of research resulted in a virtuous circle where each part serves to stimulate the others. The outcome is a significant dyslexia research knowledge base in the United Kingdom, with the United Kingdom acknowledged as a centre of excellence in matters relating to dyslexia.

15 dera.ioe.ac.uk/14790/7/00659-2009DOM-EN_Redacted.pdf

16 www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted

17 www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance

18 scholar.google.co.nz/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&as_vis=1&q=PhD+papers+on+dyslexia&btnG=and and www.academia.edu

The United Kingdom Government agencies

The United Kingdom Department for Education

A strong focus on the provision of extensive information about dyslexia. Like all UK Government agencies, includes extensive guidance to assist with accessibility. The Department for Education¹⁹ has actively published policies and procedures to ensure diversity in its own staff. Data on their success is published. The Department also conducts the results of Equality Analyses of GCSE examinations and of curricula in general to prevent unconscious bias in learning material and exam content.

OFSTED

OFSTED – the UK agency responsible for educational standard – conducts reviews of schools and further education facilities response to the SEND (Special Education Needs and Disabilities) requirements²⁰. Extensive information is published for parents and learners about benefits, learner support and access to the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA).

Education Scotland

The Education Department in Scotland provides quality information about dyslexia on its website. The resource is managed by Dyslexia Scotland – a good example of collaboration between state agencies and national associations. The new Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit (2017) is a free online resource funded by the Scottish Government, managed by Dyslexia Scotland and developed by the Toolkit Working Group²¹.

Education Scotland commissioned an independent report into the educational experience of children with Dyslexia for the Scottish Government²².

Education Wales

Education Wales recently commissioned a useful report into the provision of education for children with dyslexia²³.

Education Funding Agency (EFA)

The EFA in the United Kingdom (equivalent to the Tertiary Education Commission in New Zealand) publishes detailed annual data on participation rates in Further Education and Skills training, broken down by “disability”, age and level of study. Note: Dyslexia is by far the biggest category by numbers funded.

Also on the Education Funding Agency website is extensive information about dyslexia, what support services are available, and sign-posting to other agencies who can provide services.

19 www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education

20 www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25

21 education.gov.scot/media/pb2av1iy/inc37dyslexiareportexecutivesummary2014.pdf

22 education.gov.scot/media/pb2av1iy/inc37dyslexiareportexecutivesummary2014.pdf

23 gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-08/120824-current-literacy-dyslexia-provision-en.pdf

The Dyslexia support sector in the United Kingdom

There are many agencies in the United Kingdom covering all aspects of dyslexia:

- › The British Dyslexia Association (BDA) is the most well-known national organisation. It recommends standards, arranges training, and hosts national and international conferences. PATOSS (Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Special Learning Difficulties).
- › Dyslexia Action – an organisation with a training focus
- › The Dyslexia Guild – a network of professionals in the field
- › Dyslexia Action Shops network
- › Helen Arkell Dyslexia Centre
- › ADSHE–Association of Dyslexia Specialists in Higher Education
- › CRSTeD –A register of schools that teach dyslexic learners (Council for the Registration of Schools Teaching Dyslexic Pupils)
- › The Driver Youth Trust
- › A range of localised dyslexia associations such as Dyslexia Scotland, Dyslexia Ireland, and Dyslexia Cymru, as well as some regional associations such as Dyslexia South West

The total impact of the legislative framework, the considerable government funding, and the establishment and strengthening of agencies operating in the sector has resulted in a culture of support for dyslexic learners.

Parents and learners now have a better understanding of dyslexia. They know their rights and they have expectations that educational organisations will meet their needs.

Parents have banded together to form Parents Groups and receive monthly newsletters, where dyslexia focused schools can and do promote themselves. Teachers, both in pre-service training and in in-service have many opportunities to learn about dyslexia²⁴.

Legislative provisions place expectations on educational providers and health providers. Much of the provision of dyslexia support services has been delegated to a regional and local authority level. Regional and city councils are required to notify the public of support that is available for parents and learners in their area²⁵. In this way the wider community has a good understanding of dyslexia – not just educators.

United Kingdom accreditation schemes

The Dyslexia-Friendly Quality Mark (DFQM)

The DFQM is a set of standards for best practice for organisations to support dyslexic learners.

The target audiences in the United Kingdom include:

- › Schools
- › Post 16 Training Providers
- › Further and High Education organisations
- › Youth Offending Teams and organisations
- › Children and Young Person Services.

24 www.researchgate.net/publication/255958829_What_Do_Preservice_Teachers_from_the_USA_and_the_UK_Know_about_Dyslexia

25 www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/asset-library/imported-assets/CAMBRIDGESHIRE%20DYSLEXIA%20GUIDANCE%20FEBRUARY%202019.pdf

The DFQM provides a measure of quality that schools, and other organisations can use to promote themselves. Many educational organisations actively promote themselves as dyslexia friendly education providers.

The BDA Smart Award

The BDA Smart Award is a less demanding quality standard.

Parents can choose to send their children to a school that meets the specialised needs of their children.

Beyond secondary school level education providers still see value in delivering services in the way that best meets the needs of learners with dyslexia²⁶.

Identified positive practices in the United Kingdom

No provider is an island.

The United Kingdom is an example where the wider environment has provided the framework for the dyslexia support that exists in the UK. Higher Education and Further Education (FE) organisations in the UK exist in an environment where there is a wide range of information and guidance about dyslexia support. For example, there is a pan-sector document providing information about university study for learners with dyslexia. This provides a benchmark for positive practice and enables potential learners to select a university that meets their needs. It also serves to encourage providers to meet the market standard.

1. Accessibility

Most universities and other FE organisations have an accessibility tab on their website that informs potential or existing dyslexic learners about how best to navigate their website. Many Universities notify learners of the “accessibility supports” that are available to assist learners to access the website²⁷. These are, for many people, a token gesture as they are very complex and difficult to navigate. They are much better if they are accompanied with a tutorial to explain just how to access the supports offered.

2. A published guide for dyslexic learners and their parents.

There is a published guide for dyslexic learners wishing to study at University²⁸. The site contains all the information necessary to successfully navigate the entry to university process. It includes information about how to apply for the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) – which provides for funding for assistive technologies, extra photocopying, and one-to-one tutor support. Also available is a guide to which universities provide the best support for dyslexic learners.

3. Quality information

For most organisations support for dyslexic learners revolves around the publication of quality information about dyslexia, both for learners and for staff. Leicester University has a good record in this area. They provide extensive and welcoming information for learners and comprehensive guidance for tutors and markers, both in delivering learning and assessment and marking best practice.

26 www.oldham.ac.uk/first-for-a-uk-fe-college-oldham-college-gets-dyslexia-smart-award

27 www.edgehill.ac.uk/accessibility-statement

28 www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/student-advice/applying-to-uni/dyslexic-students-university-guide

4. Research

At many universities research into dyslexia is a focus for the organisation, serving to further regularise dyslexia. Organisations that understand dyslexia are better equipped to support dyslexic learners. The University of Sheffield is a good example of this expertise and approach.

5. Active promotion

Many tertiary education organisations actively promote themselves as “Dyslexia-Friendly”, e.g., Edge Hill University²⁹. These organisations run “dyslexia-awareness weeks” to improve acceptance of dyslexia and celebrate the success of their learners with dyslexia.

6. Proactive process to identify learners with dyslexia

Many UK providers have processes to provide a paid screening for learners who have not already had an assessment. (Many dyslexic learners will have already been identified in the secondary school sector before entering tertiary study, but even in the UK, many still fall through the cracks).

7. Access to assistive technologies

For most learners the DSA (Disabled Students Allowance) is available. Tertiary providers are very proactive in encouraging and guiding learners to access the DSA.

Singapore

The environment for dyslexia

Singapore is recognized for its support for dyslexic learners and was an early mover on the world stage. Their development occurred when Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew discovered he was dyslexic, and became instrumental in setting up support throughout Singapore. Today Singapore’s support for dyslexia is led by the strong Dyslexia Association of Singapore (DAS).

Until recently the support for dyslexic learners in Singapore has been limited to children in primary and secondary schools. Since 2017 there has been a move to extend their support for dyslexic learners into tertiary education and the workplace.

Singapore Government agencies

In the latest available annual report, the Singapore government reports funding 45% of the Dyslexia Association of Singapore’s annual operating budget³⁰.

The Singapore government also partially fund screening and support for dyslexic children in poorer families, alongside scholarships for dyslexic learners.

29 www.edgehill.ac.uk/?s=support+for++dyslexic+learners

30 www.das.org.sg/images/documents/financial-information/fy1920/DAS-Group-Annual-Report2020.pdf

Identified positive practices in Singapore

A feature of initiatives in Singapore is that they regularly partner with Universities in the UK and the USA to ensure they are following research based positive practice. There are references in the literature to collaborations with University College London as well as Cornell University in the US.

Recently Singapore has recognised the need to provide quality support at the tertiary and workplace level. They are in the early stages of developing this support. However, there are some examples of positive practice emerging.

1. The Nanyang Technological University

A pilot programme incorporates technology, in particular virtual reality technology to work one on one with dyslexic learners³¹.

2. The HeadsUp programme

Run by the Singapore Institute of Technical Education, this pilot programme is informed by advice from Cornell University in the USA. The focus is on building up skills for remembering instructions, multi-tasking, and planning or prioritising projects.

They use the Cornell note-taking system devised by a professor at Cornell University that encourages students to formulate questions based on notes they had jotted down in class.

Australia

The environment for dyslexia

The history of support for dyslexia in Australia is similar to New Zealand. There was a Commission of Inquiry into dyslexia in Australia in 1992 that confirmed the existence of dyslexia, but little was done to address it. It was mostly left to the individual states to address the issue. Currently the level of uptake varies from state to state, and there is disagreement on approach between the states. The main drive to address dyslexia is its impact on the acquisition of literacy skills in children. As such most support is provided at primary and secondary school level.

Within this, there are pockets of excellent practice, however it is largely limited to services and support provided by Learning Support Departments in tertiary organisations, as opposed to a cross-organisation approach. As such, many initiatives in Australia are based around learning support departments being effective at doing their jobs well. Having a focus in these departments is progress, but the unintended consequence is to separate learning support services from the rest of the organisations provision. This approach does little to change the practices of the majority of front-line educators. Such responses cannot be called holistic.

A by-product of the vast size of Australia is the number of country-wide networks of practitioners and sites for the sharing of information.

31 www.straitstimes.com/singapore/students-with-dyslexia-turn-to-technology-for-better-learning-experience

Australian Government agencies

As is standard for most activities in the Australian government framework, dyslexia related matters are delegated to the individual states. There are some national frameworks and federally implied rules, but they are largely generic, with little detail.

Frameworks do set some high-level messages nationally. The *Disability Standards for Education Act 2005* sets out levels of service expected for learners who identify as 'disabled'. This act covers all sectors of education from pre-school through to University level and is comprehensively reviewed every five years. The review process is user friendly with documents published in easy to read format, and submissions able to be made as a video, an audio file or in a standard format.

Individual state responses

Tasmania

- › Easily discoverable accessibility information – not hidden away.
- › Widespread use of explanation videos in addition to text to explain government initiatives.
- › All Australian states gather and publish the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD). This data includes measures of “Disability Support”.

New South Wales

- › The most user friendly of the Australian States – Disability Strategy is referenced on the front page of their website.
- › Accessibility information updated in 2020.
- › Includes links to the “Designing for Disability” features on the Home Office Digital website in the United Kingdom, where they specialise in the latest developments in accessibility.
- › Despite numerous references to their work in disability no reference specifically to dyslexia. Instead they were seemingly linked together with “Mental Disability”.

Queensland

- › A strong section on understanding dyslexia – with extensive information for parents.
- › Extensive links to the Australian Dyslexia Association. Many references to the ADA as the reputable source of information.

Victoria

- › Extensive information about dyslexia – both for parents and separate information for teachers.

South Australia

- › The first state to introduce comprehensive phonics screening for all Year 1 learners (similar to that used in the UK) in an effort to identify dyslexia as soon as possible.
- › This is one part of the Literacy Guarantee initiative³², a comprehensive programme to improve state literacy levels – with identifying and addressing dyslexia being part of that.

32 www.education.sa.gov.au/teaching/curriculum-and-teaching/numeracy-and-literacy/literacy-guarantee

Identified positive practices in Australia

1. The University of Melbourne, Victoria

Melbourne University has an extensive Best Practice guide for its educators written by its own learners who had dyslexia. This is a very student centred approach – for learners to provide advice to staff based on their own experiences. The short guide is comprehensive, including tell-tale signs and guidance for classroom practices, as well as the special talents and skills often demonstrated by people with dyslexia. It serves to regularise dyslexia and bring dyslexic learners into everyday conversation.

2. Swinburne University, Victoria

Swinburne has an active partnership with SPELD Victoria. In many places there is a divide and a lot of suspicion between academia and dyslexia support services. Swinburne has addressed this divide by forming a partnership which is successful in providing support to learners and advancing a conversation around their support.

3. The University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales

UNE has a comprehensive support programme for dyslexic learners. It is based on a pre-assessment conducted by the Australian Dyslexia Association that is free to the learner and scan trigger other supports, like assistive technologies and human supports, to foster success. All services are free to the learner.

At UNE assistive technologies are made available to all learners, regardless of whether they have been identified as dyslexic or not.

4. University of Tasmania

UTAS has an inclusive regime to support dyslexic learners. Features include:

- › Site licences for assistive technologies, such as Read&Write and Dragon Naturally Speaking. These packages are made available to learners regardless of whether or not they have been assessed as dyslexic.
- › Studiocity is available to all learners. Studiocity is an international study skills “cloud based” support package.
- › Coaching/training sessions are run to help learners master the assistive technology.
- › The university has set up a network/support group for dyslexic learners.
- › Tutoring staff are provided with professional development in understanding dyslexia and supporting dyslexic learners.
- › Information and advocacy websites like Dear Dyslexic are advertised and made available to learners.

5. Access to the Australian Disability Clearinghouse for Education and Training (ADCET)

All tertiary providers in Australia have access to the services of ADCET³³. ADCET is a clearing house for information, resources, advice, and professional development for all practitioners working with disabled learners. ADCET’s definition of disabled includes learners with dyslexia and other neurodiversity. ADCET is a nationwide entity, based in Tasmania.

6. The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE)

Based at Curtin University in Perth, the NCSEHE³⁴ is a research and policy centre funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment.

33 www.adcet.edu.au

34 www.ncsehe.edu.au

7. AUSTED List

Learning Support Departments in Australia are well supported by membership of Austed-List, a closed network of learning support professionals and educators working with learners with “disability”. It is run under the auspices of ATEND – the Australian Tertiary Network on Disability. Members include many Kiwis as well as Australians.

United States of America

The environment for dyslexia

The Federal Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA Act) passed in 1990. Amendments in 2004 include references to dyslexia. Most of the responsibilities for action are delegated to individual states. The response has been uneven, with four states having no legislation and providing no state-wide action or funding. The level of support for dyslexic learners depends on initiatives at county, city, or organisation level. At best, support for dyslexia is patchy.

Identified recommended practices in the United States of America

1. The University of Arizona

Arizona promotes its support for “alternative learners” via its Strategic Alternative Learning Techniques (SALT) programme³⁵ (which has been running for over 20 years).

2. Yale University

Yale sets out to cater for diversity and specifically for dyslexia. It has a Centre for Dyslexia and Creativity³⁶. By linking dyslexia and creativity it shows a positive face of dyslexia, making it potentially mainstream, visible and acceptable. At an organisational level Yale provides teacher training courses and suggests that it provides instruction in a “dyslexia friendly way”.

3. Specific learning environments

In addition to the organisational specific examples above, there are many universities that have in-house programmes to cater for dyslexic learners. Some universities have also been established to cater exclusively for such learners – for example:

- › University of Arizona, Tucson Arizona
- › Curry College, Milton MA
- › Southern Methodist University, Dallas Texas
- › West Virginia Wesleyan College, West Virginia
- › Marshall University, West Virginia

4. Information for parents and learners

There is a useful published guide³⁷ that sets out and ranks organisations in terms of support for dyslexic learners. This provides information for parents and potential learners when choosing tertiary organisations.

35 www.arizona.edu/news/2018/04/salt-center-model

36 dyslexia.yale.edu

37 www.bestvalueschools.com/rankings/colleges-dyslexic-students

Recommendations

Analysis of practices gathered from tertiary education organisations outside New Zealand, alongside the author’s professional knowledge, has supported development of the recommendations in this section. Recommendations are that of the author, provided at request as advice to the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC).

Recommendations for action

- › The TEC examines its own website and other communications with the sector to ensure it follows positive practice in communicating with those affected by or requiring information about dyslexia³⁸. By doing this the TEC would be demonstrating positive practice and strong leadership, both to the tertiary education sector and to other government agencies.
- › The TEC publishes research-based information about dyslexia in tertiary education on their website, to provide a reliable source of advice for Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs), whānau, teachers, and learners.
- › The TEC develops, with the support of the sector, a “Recommended Practice Guide to Support Dyslexic Learners” for TEOs.
- › A request for organisations to describe actions to support learners with dyslexia as a requirement for TEOs submitting Investment Plans³⁹ to the TEC.
- › TEC explores taking a more direct role in the supply of assistive technologies to tertiary learners. The current model of funding via MSD/Workbridge is cumbersome and difficult to navigate. The prices of assistive technologies are coming down rapidly. A model where such technology is freely available should be explored.
- › Investigate the need for and potential funding sources to establish a New Zealand Dyslexia Advisory Committee (NZDAC). The NZDAC could be contracted to provide advice and policy input regarding ongoing support for dyslexia. Such organisations are well established in some comparable jurisdictions.
- › Consider the establishment of a Centre of Research Excellence in neurodiversity within a TEO in New Zealand. Such a Centre would be a conduit for knowledge, research, and teacher training.

38 There are functions – like Read Aloud and the ability to change background colour and font size that can make access for neurodiverse people much more straight forward.

39 TEOs are required to submit investment plans on a regular (usually annually or bi-annually) schedule to TEC to secure their funding.

Appendices

The Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark – United Kingdom

Many tertiary education organisations in the United Kingdom have been awarded the British Dyslexia Association (BDA) Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark (DFQM). As such they are examples of positive practice for support of dyslexic learners.

Within these are several tertiary education organisations who have been the subject of an academic evaluation of the DFQM, conducted by Dr Dominic Griffiths and Dr Kath Kelly of the Manchester Metropolitan University: Blackpool Sixth Form College; Frewen College and Wellacre Academy. The practice of having an external, independent academic review conducted on the effectiveness of the DFQM is in itself an example of good practice that ensures very high standards. See details later.

There was a consistent stream of positive behaviours demonstrated by the organisations evaluated. These fell under four main headings:

1. Leadership and management
2. Teaching and learning
3. Organisation environment and wider resourcing
4. Student and parents' views

Leadership and management

- › The dyslexia-friendly culture is a holistic, whole-organisation issue
- › A senior staff member with specialist knowledge drives the initiative, supported by a small team of committed staff
- › There is collaboration with outside agencies (e.g. Local authorities and other academic organisations)
- › The organisation's dyslexia journey started with an audit of current practices, followed by a regularly reviewed action plan
- › The action plan was a process of many observable incremental gains that were regularly celebrated
- › There was regular professional development, augmented by active peer support
- › All staff understood they needed to "buy in" to the initiative
- › The organisations adoption of a dyslexia-friendly status was further supplemented by a purposeful staff recruitment policy.

Teaching and learning

- › All staff had access to information about dyslexia and regular professional development
- › There was active and structured peer support
- › There was a commitment by staff to use the most informed teaching practices, such as multisensory delivery and kinaesthetic activities
- › Assessment activities were multisensory and not completely text driven
- › The use of technology by learners was encouraged and teachers used technology in their teaching. Mind mapping and other software was encouraged and supported
- › Learners were given direct instruction on metacognition
- › Kinaesthetic activities and other practical activities were used to support learner's weaker working memories
- › Organisations were adopters of modern instruction methodologies – like Learning Walls, Universal Design for Learning principles and Kagan Learning sets (co-operative learning activities developed by Johns Hopkins University in the US).

Organisation environment and wider resourcing

- › Organisation followed positive practices in the production of resources, such as font type and size, paper colour, screen colour
- › Assistive technologies made available to all learners, along with guidance how best to use it
- › The organisation's website made it obvious that dyslexic learners were welcome and would be supported
- › Success stories of dyslexic learners were displayed to inspire learners.

Student and parent views

- › There were active measures taken to consult with learners, parents and “significant others” to foster a team culture
- › The organisations realised that parents/partners/others were an important part of the learners support network
- › The feedback from learners and parents served to reinforce positive practice by educators and support staff inside the organisation.

The Dyslexia Smart Award – United Kingdom

The Dyslexia Smart award is a less demanding recognition for education and non-education organisations who chose not to meet the rigorous standards of the DFQM. While not as demanding as the DFQM it is a recognised statement of standards an organisation can put on its website and other documentation. One example of a Dyslexia Smart Award holder is Oldham College (a Further Education organisation, linked to a university).

Organisations with the Dyslexia Smart accreditation undertake to:

- › Raise awareness of dyslexia
- › Identify a dyslexic lead in the organisations
- › Take pro-active steps to assist learners who seek support
- › Make a clear commitment to engage with the dyslexia community
- › Keep up to date with developments in the dyslexia world
- › Identify, track and report on progress on dyslexic learners
- › Celebrate the successes of dyslexic learners.

The United Kingdom Equality Act, 2010

The Equality Act defines a disability as: “a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”. Substantial is defined as ‘more than trivial’.

Therefore, as dyslexia is a lifelong condition and has a significant impact on a person’s day-to-day life, it meets the criteria of a disability and is covered by The Equality Act 2010.

An employer must not refuse to employ someone simply because they have a disability. They also have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace. This duty begins with the recruitment process, so recruitment and selection processes must be dyslexia-friendly to be lawful.

The United Kingdom Disabled Students Allowance (DSA)

A fund⁴⁰ which provides help with the costs of:

- › specialist equipment, for example a computer if one is needed because of disability
- › non-medical helpers
- › extra travel because of disability
- › other disability-related costs of studying.

Learners need to pay the first £200, which is the minimum cost that any student is likely to incur when buying a computer.

The Yale University Declaration of Rights for Dyslexic Students

The Yale Declaration of Rights⁴¹ includes the following five rights for learners with dyslexia:

1. An accurate diagnosis
2. Entitlement to use the term “dyslexic” to describe themselves and for others to use that term
3. Evidence based instruction
4. Accommodations (assistive technologies) to support their success
5. A dyslexic friendly environment in which to live and study.

40 www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas

41 dyslexia.yale.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/YCDC_DeclarationOfRights.pdf



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